

The Art of Circumnavigation: A Collection of Poetry

Creative Writing Thesis

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by

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***On Awareness/On Awareness 2.0***

1 Gray, the almost-sunrise peeked  
2 through the glass, casting dawn  
3 around the bedroom, slipping  
4 under my swollen eyelids  
5 to wake me.

6 With my cheeks still  
7 sticky from the salt-ridden tears  
8 I shed just hours before, I sat up,  
9 stirring the faintest hints of smoke  
10 and perfume from my clothes.  
11 I had woken up without her long before  
12 now, but this time it was real—  
13 her absence was all the more  
14 tangible amongst the loneliness  
15 seeping from my fingertips.

16 I was more aware

17 of the air conditioner humming  
18 its simple song, the cat silently  
19 breathing to its own slumber,  
20 the wallpaper curling  
21 at its aged-and-yellowed corners:  
22 an ever-present innocence.

23 And I thought, *this isn't so bad*.

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22 an ever-present innocence.  
20 The wallpaper, curling at its age,  
18 its simple song, the cat silent,

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14 Tangible amongst the loneliness  
12 now, this time it was real—  
10 perfume from my clothes,  
8 shed just hours before. I sat up  
6 with my cheeks still  
4 under my swollen eyelids  
2 through the glass, casting dawn.

## *Sweetgum*

My grandpa stirred warmed honey into black  
coffee in the morning and I'd wake  
up to the chime of silverware—the ring  
against his cup. The sounds of caffeine-sighs  
linger till noon as the sun shifts oblong  
rectangles across the kitchen floor.  
He spent the afternoons outside to pick  
the fallen gumballs from the shady ground;  
I think the fall is common, natural.  
The trees look peculiar with their edge-  
wise plates of bark that breach the sky like knives.  
I want to hold their pointed hands, embrace  
their blooms in my cold palms. My grandpa drags  
his feet back and forth—his gray against  
trodden green, a metal bucket droops,  
dangling from his old, white-knuckled fist.  
He doesn't know I watch him from the house.  
The feelings, we don't talk about. We find  
it easier to plug our gaping holes  
with thorny sweetgum fruit in place of words.

***Things I Would Tell You (Letter to a Stranger)***

I would tell you about my year if I knew you  
wanted to hear adventures of triumph  
and heartbreak. I would tell you everything  
selflessly. *Grab your coat, it's chilly*, I'd say.  
I would tell you I love you in the way I tell my mother  
it's raining. I can't write much about myself. I'm up  
to half a pack a day and I don't want to make anything  
seem prettier than what it is.

So, if you're still smoking, silently apologize  
to your mother.

### *Expectations of a Scab*

You arranged a horizontal gash on the soft surface  
beneath your forearm, where blood seeped  
like rubies from my pastel-peach skin. You thought  
it kind of pretty, but in the way you knew better  
things were to come – soon, the jewels would end,  
darken to burgundy, become brittle, and finally  
dissolve back into a flaky blank canvas.

You're not mad, though; you're merely fascinated.  
It's like when someone asks,  
"Is a rectangle a square?"  
but this time, "Is the body judgmental?"

You don't deserve to be protected, yet  
you expect it. The body is just oblivious.

***Drowning Girl, Roy Lichtenstein, Oil Paint, 1963***

Ben-Day dots simplify drowning  
when it comes to lessening weight,  
separating context, squarely cropping  
a barely-surfaced face detached  
from love, from war.

I only wonder what happened  
to Drowning Girl, what made her  
come to terms with her fate—  
how she would *rather sink*  
*than call Brad for help!*

This summer, to be more like her—  
to be more removed, more  
content—I'll dot myself daily with red  
ink, outline my lips, my nose, sketch on  
my expression in black until I'm made up,  
until I don't need Brad either.

***On Getting it Right***

In the fall we kissed  
long and hard like she was fire  
in my November

hands. She'd hold my neck  
as her lips gave me reasons  
to exist—*just live*.

I'd lie in her bed  
wanting to shout all the ways  
I'm captivated,

but I could only  
tell her the ways I can't come  
to terms with J.D.

Salinger being too dead  
to talk about *The Catcher*  
and give me answers.

Because I thought it  
would help to warn her a lot  
was heavy in me—

how I, too, wanted  
to know where the ducks go in  
winter, let her know

I just had it bad  
for the way she'd stay around  
through all the seasons.

*Lauren,*

as in the way *L* slips delicately  
from the brain—from the little home  
it was given when she said she was in  
love—flicking from the tongue, into  
a small oblivion, where it ties itself  
to *a*, lingering inseparably alongside *u*;  
pulling *r* back in with a magnetic force  
that rearranges the lips (used to place  
the softest kisses on her back as she  
sleeps); sneaking *e* in the bedroom  
window before sunrise; lightly holding  
*n* for a short slow-dance between tongue  
and teeth; finally releasing in staccato  
everything that matters most in one word.  
I start and end with her. Everything starts  
and ends with her and nothing is silent.



*catatumbolightning.jpg*

Storm chasing is an art  
form when she's the storm  
I'm after. I want to inhabit  
the Maracaibo basin, Andes  
mountain range—submit  
her existence to the National  
Weather Service title her  
catatumbolightning.jpg

She's the nighttime  
clockwork I live for.  
I'm in pursuit of her  
hot-cold skyscape; marsh-methane  
cloud electricity; atmospheric  
phenomenon, on the quest  
for an undetermined destination –  
an intangible experience.  
I long to be one with her  
forces of nature.

She's my recreational endeavor;  
my curiosity; my maritime  
navigation; my motivation;  
the lightning in my perfect storm.

*herbarium*

women could be called houseplants, easily / grown decorations. but I look for a woman / in  
conifer forests where my toes graze / soft dirt covered in needles where grass does not grow /  
near the roots, the shaded parts. that's where I find her / not just *a woman* but *her* – with  
compositions / sprouting leaves as she breathes out / calmness dressed as caladiums, coleus, and  
crotons

she is  
my ornamental curiosity

my adenosine triphosphate

my epiphyte                      host

my only herbarium                      I am

a collector

of her, I have her pressed  
between sheets – not saved  
in boxes, because she is not bulky,  
she is delicate. I call her '*November  
12; found in conifer forest; found  
in soft dirt; found in needles  
and roots; found in shade; woman;  
her; with compositions sprouting*'  
because I have to be exact  
she is not easily grown, yet  
I kiss her hands as she writes  
African violets, azaleas, begonias.

### ***For Happiness***

I decided we could find a February home  
in your classical piece on Brazil—  
where the jazz echoes in a blue-green  
*frevo*, just as the golden clarinets  
move us to roam humid streets  
as if they're all we've known.  
We can't get lost—the cities hold  
fragrances of *Carnaval* to guide us back:  
sweet empanadas' native cologne.  
And each one would take us in without  
question. We would come alive beneath lights  
so tiny, twinkling your grace notes against  
the night sky's purpled orange. We'd glow,  
the dance stirring our feet, anticipating shouts  
of *para felicidade* in a trance.

## *Welcome Home*

I'd sweep out dusty corners of my brain  
to give you a home, an entire zip code  
in Temporal Lobe. I'd leave  
your dream Steinway grand  
in the entryway so you could write me  
something nice; hang our night-blue'd  
New Year's Eve photo in the hallway  
so you'd see it each time you passed.  
In the late mornings I'd call you  
from Hippocampus, tell you the forecast—

probably partly cloudy  
with afternoon sun boxing four pm  
onto your living room floor. I'd come  
lie with you in the warmth, tell you:

*Darling, everything is so bright  
here. Welcome home.*

## *Victory*

The ‘Dores went three and nine again. We heard  
the hum; the crowd shuffling through the night,  
tangled in static waves.

We watched the sky  
until the bright, navy fluorescence left  
Centennial Park dim. I figured Jess  
Neely Drive was pretty depressed by now,  
wondered if frats still felt inclined to throw  
a few more back.

L grabbed my hand. We downed  
warm remnants of Platinum Bud from black,  
Star V cups, a spliff passing between our lips.  
I dashed a smile at her blue-gray eyes  
We laughed because we foresaw it—

Vandy’s fall.  
Even the Parthenon was glowing gold,  
rooting for them each Saturday—a not-  
so-good good luck charm.

I wanted her  
to race me through the lawn, to the full-scale  
steps, to see our shadows bend against  
the pillars at obtuse angles. I bet  
that William Dinsmoor did not plan for this:

intoxicated feet stomping their way  
to victory, to feel smaller and tall  
at once despite everything else—  
a win within inevitable loss.

### *The Nashville Coast*

After the bars closed up at last  
call and their neons continued  
blurring fluorescence onto  
the jasper-like surface, we walked  
down Broadway to our place  
by the river. The water sang to us  
in hushed slaps against the black-  
cemented shores, disturbing  
docked dinner boats. I didn't tell you  
that I love you  
something-and-one-third times,  
always leaving the best words  
unsaid. You told me being there  
sounded like a distant ocean  
but all I could think was how I want  
to be more than just floating  
in the evening next to manmade banks.

To have your daytime, too,  
I'd study your currents, fight  
any transatlantic tide.

### *Hypothetically*

We'll stay up till six, sleep till three  
like last year. I'll lift your shirt  
to wake you, touch the freckles  
by your bellybutton, give them  
mindless names (like *menyn glas*)  
you won't take seriously,  
so you'll morning-laugh into my hair.  
I'll love you so much,

I think I'll start  
buttering my turkey sandwiches  
to channel my inner you. You'll rave,  
*It was the condiment of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*,  
and we'll discuss Eliza  
Leslie's ham sandwich from 1836, how  
she figured it out.

You'd tell me the butter helped  
hold the bread together,  
made everything softer on the teeth.

When you're away, I'll start thinking  
of the economy, the efficiency in buying  
a hundred bricks of Blue Bonnet, peeling  
away their waxy papers, immersing  
myself to be softer for you, to hold  
us together.

### *The Theory of Relativity*

I can still call her the gravity  
venturing across dimensions:  
quantum, physical. I can reconcile  
her relativity with intricacy  
laced through her still-familiar hands.  
Dresden, I'll call her now as her name  
sits smoky behind my teeth—  
the same way she sits still  
and heavy in German cafés, while I scratch  
letters I'll never send her  
from four thousand miles away.  
I need to be closer

to the Czech border, to the Elbe, to solving  
the deep curve of our ephemeral space-  
time. She said she didn't know  
how to define it, the Einstein tensor,  
but I will *keep trying, keep going,*  
*keep working.*



### *How to Be an Explorer*

Channel your inner Tasmanian pioneer,  
your modern-day Lady Jane Franklin.  
Map out the British Isles on your lover's  
back—find her home, your way into her  
kingdom. Out Stack will survive  
in the northernmost freckle on her right  
shoulder blade—an attempt to find something  
missing. In this case, your absolute  
memorization of her. You're bound to explore  
every inch of the seabird cliffs until you find  
answers in her flesh, risen from your warm breath.  
Spend time with the rock on the Whitby coast—  
the one that probably surfaced three past-lives  
ago when you weren't as fortunate to be doing  
what you're doing now—and mark a spot  
for every stone you would skip into the ocean  
with her. Think of Cædmon's Hymn, but only  
for the sounds. And when you finally head west,  
draw a path to the Western Rocks—the uninhabited  
land. This is when you'll be alone. When settling  
is discouraged and difficult. When you become  
aware of the dangers, the misunderstanding  
of the currents through fog. When the rain showers  
get too loud on the journey, so you give up  
on what's still lost. You don't come here anymore.

***If I Were a Rotary Dial***

*“When Route 66 was closed to the majority of traffic and the other highway came in, I felt just like I had lost an old friend. But some of us stuck it out and are still here on Route 66.” — Lillian Redman*

For you, I would be made from scratch, my circles  
carved out and placed just under the circumference.  
I would rest on your favorite end table, wrapping  
myself in the sound of your voice each night.  
But after the touch-tone’s debut at the ’62 World’s Fair,  
Lillian would take me in, preserve me for authenticity  
at the Blue Swallow Motel. Basking in the period décor,

the easiest part would be living  
to interrupt your electrical currents from my nightstand  
as the night’s neon bleeds through thin curtains, glowing  
against my dark shell. If I had strong arms I would try  
harder to reach you, dial out your name to get in touch  
again just to keep my hands busy all the time—

*5-2-8-7-3-6...*

*If you’re ever in Tucumcari, I’d begin.*

*If you’re ever in Tucumcari...I’d repeat, just to dream  
the feeling of your presence, your fingertips  
grazing my rounded edges again.*

### *Life Expectancy*

That summer, I would have rather been alone, watching the dust settle in the cracks of your empty bedroom. I would have rather lost my mind in every fiber that found a home in the corners of your windowsills next to empty cans of tea, between the paper cranes we made from old gas station receipts.

Instead, I spent the first two months of the season thinking of your skin, turning over the idea of cells having a life expectancy of seven years. In just eighty-two more months I would no longer be able to be find the home I once had, where I would cling to your thighs and your wrists and your cheeks as you slept.

//

After you're married—when I do finally fall away—could you at least sweep me under your bed? I'll only be visible when six pm silhouettes me against the cold floor, so let me stay close.

*Hate Poem for the Things I Can't Say*

I hate when cursive *Ls* look  
more like *Js*. When the top loop  
gets a little too fat and a little  
too vertical for the space—  
like when we're being careless.

I hate when rainwater settles  
excessively near curbs.

When the sidewalks flood—  
like when we let everything  
gravitate and overflow.

I hate when it takes concentration  
to recreate familiar smells.

When it's hard to imagine  
the cherry blossoms that graze  
the skin on your neck—

like when I can't quite figure out  
how tell you all I've ever wanted  
is to squeeze inside your too-rounded  
words—touch each curving letter  
with always-reaching hands; unfathomably  
drift through the River L past flood stage;  
transform into the scent buried deep  
in your Dynamo Dresden scarf—be  
the molecules curled through  
the scarlet and gold threads,  
keeping you safe.

### ***Why I'm Not Good at To-Do Lists***

The best thing about my mother's house  
is the tall windows in my old bedroom.  
In winter, snow would collect in small drifts  
on the sill, glow in faint rosy copper at sunrise.

Last year, I opened the curtains each morning,  
dragged a shaky finger through the condensation  
coating the peached glass—through the old  
oily prints—*eat lunch, wash clothes, get dressed,*  
*water plants, take a bath.*

By spring, the plants survived, but my hair  
clung to itself for the season, and when *just get out*  
*of the house* finally melted each evening, I closed  
the curtains, covered the smudged evidence  
of what I didn't get around to again.